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Program on Breast Cancer and Environmental Risk Factors

SPRECHER
INSTITUTE
for Comparative
Cancer Research

Chemicals and the Risk of Breast Cancer

Frequently Asked Questions

■ Question

Are we exposed to pesticides banned in the U.S. when we eat produce from other countries?

■ Answer

There is a misconception that foreign producers of food can "get away" with using pesticides not allowed for use in the U.S. This is not true. Any food imported into the U.S. is held to the same standard and regulations as any domestically produced food.

Government Monitoring

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) sets the limits on the maximum level of a pesticide allowed on food for human consumption or allowed on animal fodder. This limit is called a "tolerance."

Both the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the US Dept. of Agriculture (USDA) work with state agencies to monitor the levels of pesticides in foods. The FDA is responsible for the pesticide monitoring program on fruits, vegetables, grains, dairy products, and fish/shellfish. The USDA is responsible for monitoring pesticide residues on eggs, poultry, and meat.

If any imported or domestically produced food is found to have a pesticide residue at or greater than a tolerance level set for that food, or has a pesticide not registered for use in the U.S., it can be removed and destroyed.

Reports Available Online

The FDA has published annual reports on their pesticide food monitoring program since 1987. Annual reports from 1993-2003 are available on the [FDA website](#). In the most recent report (2003), the FDA took samples of food from 99 countries at ports of entry. A total of 4,890 samples from imported foods were analyzed for pesticide residues. No residues were found on 71.8% of the imported samples, while 6.4% of the samples were found to violate tolerances.

In contrast, FDA sampled 2,344 domestic foods; 62.7% had no detectable pesticide residues, while 2.4% were in violation of tolerances. Of the samples in violation, 9 domestic and 25 imported food samples contained pesticide residues higher than the pesticide tolerance level for that particular type of produce. Most of the violations were food samples that contained residues of pesticides not registered for use in the U.S; this included 48 domestic samples and 270 imported samples.

Note: "not registered for use in the U.S." does not mean the pesticide is banned from all use; it means it is not registered for use for pest control on that particular type of food.

In the 2003 FDA report, Appendix B has a four-page table listing each imported commodity sampled, and the number

of violative samples. None of the imported grain, milk, dairy, or fish / shellfish samples had violative residues. Of the fruits, some of the imported commodities found to have pesticides not registered for use in the U.S. included blackberries, strawberries, apricots, papaya, jams and jellies; and for vegetables, peas, string beans, okra, sweet and hot peppers, tomatoes, and sweet potatoes.

Reduce Exposure: Buy Local

Locally produced foods may have less need for pesticides because pesticides are not only used during the growing process, but after harvest to prevent spoilage during transport. Buying locally from farmers that minimize use of pesticides (talk to them!) is one way to reduce consumption of foods with pesticides.

Producers in other countries are very aware of U.S. regulations. This is one reason why over 70% of imported foods sampled had no pesticide residues.

More Information

Please see BCERF fact sheet no. 25 on [Pesticide Residue Monitoring and Food Safety](#).

Ref: "Food and Drug Administration Pesticide Program Residue Monitoring 2003," 24 pages, was downloaded from FDA Pesticide Residues Monitoring Program, Annual Reports (1993-2003). Website is <http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/pesrpts.html>

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Last Reviewed: 01.12.07

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